DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 170 580 CE 021 445

TITLE	Adult Basic Education Outreach Project. Final Report (Executive Summary).
INSTITUTION	Alberta Vocational Centre, Calgary.
SPONS AGENCY	Alberta Advanced Education and Manpower, Edmonton.
PUB DATE	Apr 79
NOTE	20p.; For a related document see CE 021 446
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Adult Basic Education; *Community Programs; *Functional Illiteracy; Individualized Programs; *Outreach Programs; Performance Based Education; *Program Development; Systems Approach
IDENTIFIERS	Alberta (Calgary)

ABSTRACT

An executive report summarizes the Alberta Vocational Centre's development of a portable individualized, competency-based learning system for use in an adult basic education program in a non-institutional community location. The report deals with the project's rationale, development (including management, curricular development, budget, and site selection), and implementation. Also reviewed are the advantages and disadvantages of the outreach process and recommendations for project development, program structure, staff selection, student recruitment, and the outreach process. (Author/CSS)

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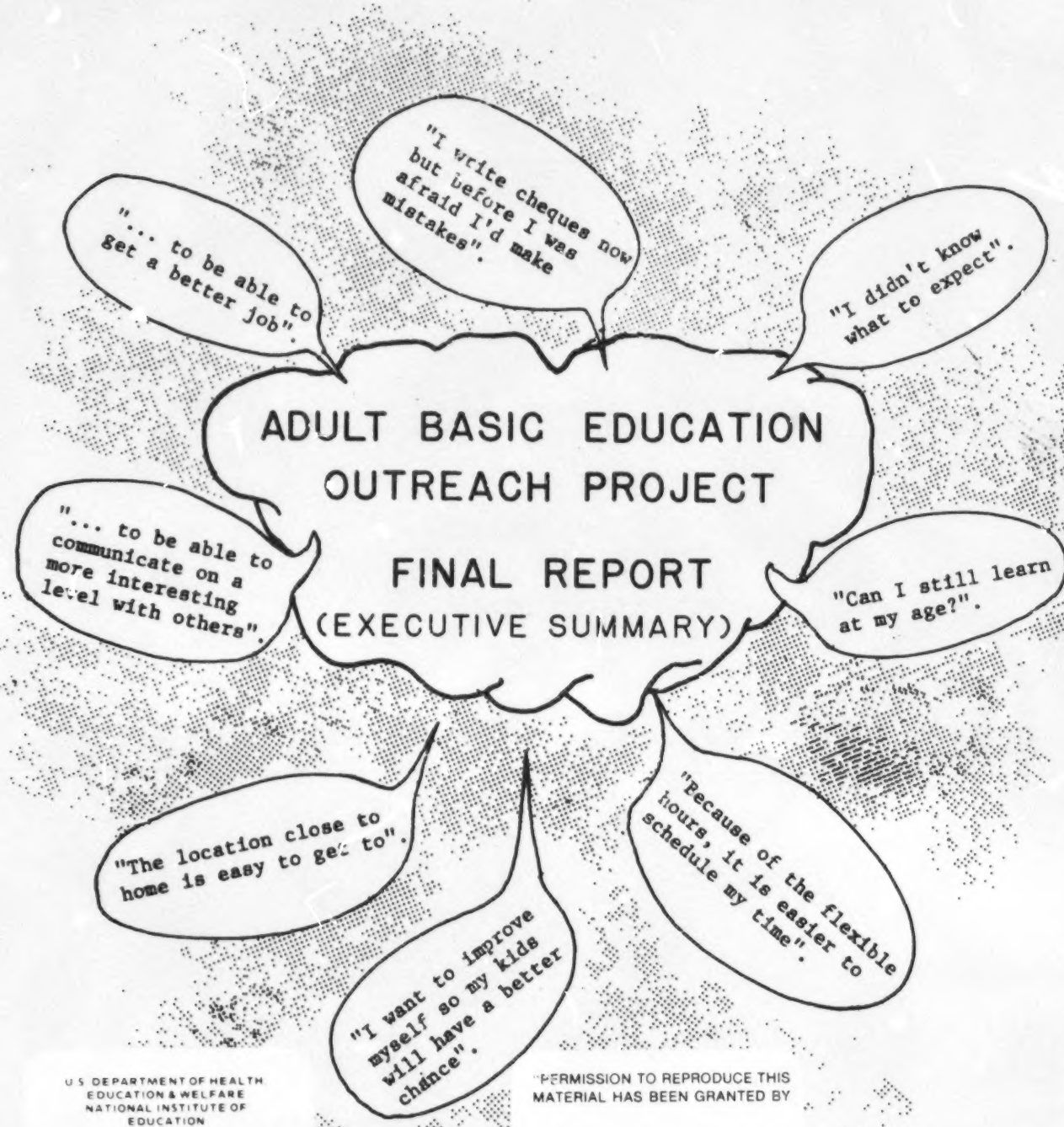
"I write cheques now but before I was afraid I'd make mistakes".
"... to be able to get a better job".
"I didn't know what to expect".
ADULT BASIC EDUCATION OUTREACH PROJECT
FINAL REPORT
(EXECUTIVE SUMMARY)
"... to be able to communicate on a more interesting level with others".
"Can I still learn at my age?".
"The location close to home is easy to get to".
"Because of the flexible hours, it is easier to schedule my time".
"I want to improve myself so my kids will have a better chance".

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CE 021 445

Submitted to
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by
Alberta Vocational Centre
Calgary, Alberta
April, 1979

ABSTRACT

Alberta Vocational Centre, Calgary, conducted an Adult Basic Education Outreach Project from October, 1977 to March, 1979. Majority funding was obtained through the Innovative Project Fund administered by Learning Systems Branch Program Services Division, Alberta Advanced Education and Manpower, Edmonton.

This executive summary deals with the project rationale, the development stage, implementation of the program, advantages and disadvantages of the Outreach process, and recommendations arising from the report.

The summary is based on the major report and some references are made to appendices contained therein. The full report including a detailed evaluation section is available on loan from A.V.C., Calgary - contact Owen Snider, 261-3930.

Owen G. Snider
Project Director

INTRODUCTION

What does the term "functional illiterate" mean to you? The Canadian Association for Adult Education (CAAE) has stated that an adult must be functioning at more than the grade eight equivalency level in reading, writing and mathematics in order to cope successfully with the demands of today's technological society (Morrison, 1975).

Surely functional illiteracy can't be a problem in Alberta; a province with a relatively low unemployment rate and a high standard of living! Audrey M. Thomas in her book "Adult Basic Education and Literacy Activities in Canada 1975-1976" provided information from the 1971 census which indicated that of the Alberta residents out of school and over 15 years of age, 28% reported their educational level as less than Grade 9 and 62% of them live in the urban

areas of the province. Also, only 6% of this total group is in the 15 - 24 age bracket. A little math will show that there is a fairly large population of functionally illiterate Albertans over 25 years of age living in our cities as well as in the rural areas.

Alberta Vocational Centre, Calgary, offers Academic Upgrading to Grade 12 in a full-time day program and to Grade 9 in an evening Continuing Education program. Both programs are offered at the downtown building, have a lengthy screening procedure, and normally have a waiting list for entry. The regular 0 - 9 level program has 48% of its students under 25 years of age and in the Continuing Education program 46% are under the age of 25 years. Many of the students in both programs are unemployed and/or on social assistance when they apply for upgrading - Day Program - 77%, Continuing Education Program - 67%.

Where then does an adult with a low level of literacy turn for help if he/she works full or part-time, cannot for some reason attend regular classes at an institution like Alberta Vocational Centre, feels threatened by an imposing educational institution and program structure, or wants to simply "get his/her feel wet" in terms of returning to or, in fact, beginning education?

Some time ago, staff at Alberta Vocational Centre, Calgary, began examining the overall problem as outlined above. It was decided that there is a tremendous need for an Adult Basic Education (ABE) program in an appropriate setting. The 1977-1978 year was given to developing a portable learning system for use in an ABE program in a non-institutional community location.

THE PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT TEAM APPROACH

Alberta Vocational Centre, Calgary, appointed a full-time Project Director in September, 1977 to orchestrate the assembly of a project proposal for

funding and subsequently to develop the program. After initial discussions with the key personnel in AVC and in Learning Systems branch, it was decided to utilize the Program Development Team approach.

This team of professionals provided input from their areas of expertise to the development of the project and also carried out specific tasks in their own area of responsibility at AVC. The project Director coordinated all activities and was free to consult any of the team members at any time on specific topics. A detailed report on the value of the Program Development Team concept is in Appendix 10 of the final report. Suffice it to say here that this system of program development and project management proved to be invaluable in this instance and would seem to be generalizable to other applications in this and other institutions.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT PLAN

Figures 1a and 1b, Project Flow Chart, outline the sequencing of the major events during the development of the Outreach project. All activities were initiated and executed by the Alberta Vocational Centre members of the Program Development Team coordinated by the Project Director. (As shown on the chart), input was solicited at various times from the Project Appraiser and various personnel from Advanced Education and Manpower.

CURRICULAR DEVELOPMENT

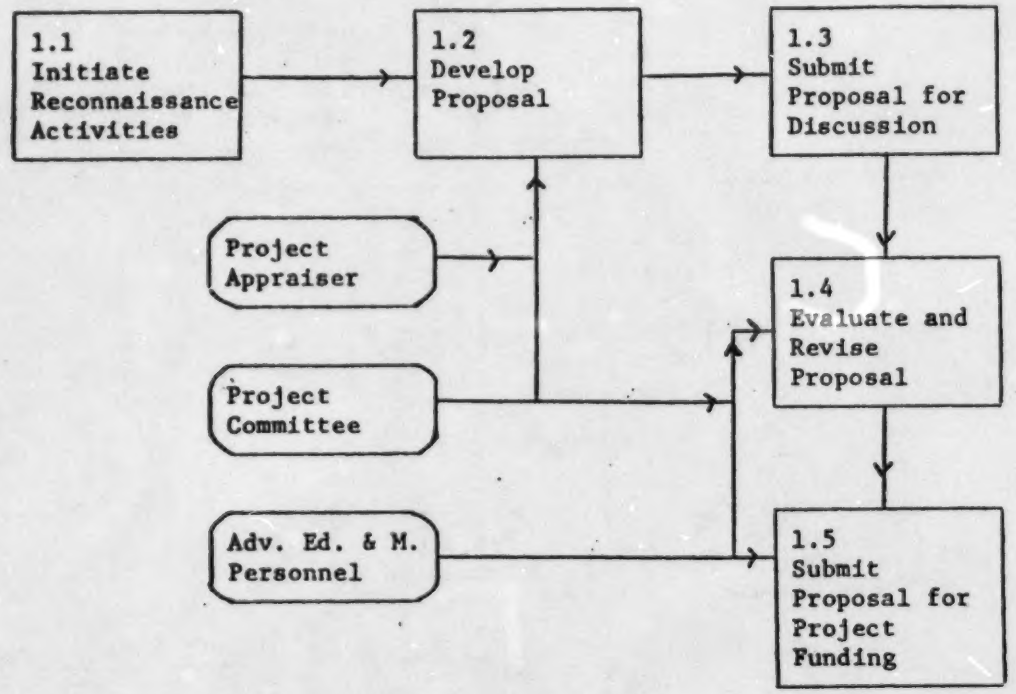
The intent was to provide an individualized, competency-based instructional program for Grade 0 - 9 Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic. This approach would be complicated by the drop-in aspect of the program and the flexible attendance policy for students. Since AVC's regular ABE program is individualized

and self-paced, it was decided to contract the curriculum development to AVC staff members who would follow a model proposed by the Project Director. This arrangement proved satisfactory for all concerned as the product was relied on heavily by the Outreach instructors. The learning resources were also ordered at this time (May, June, 1978).

Figure 1a — Project Flow Chart

Oct. '77

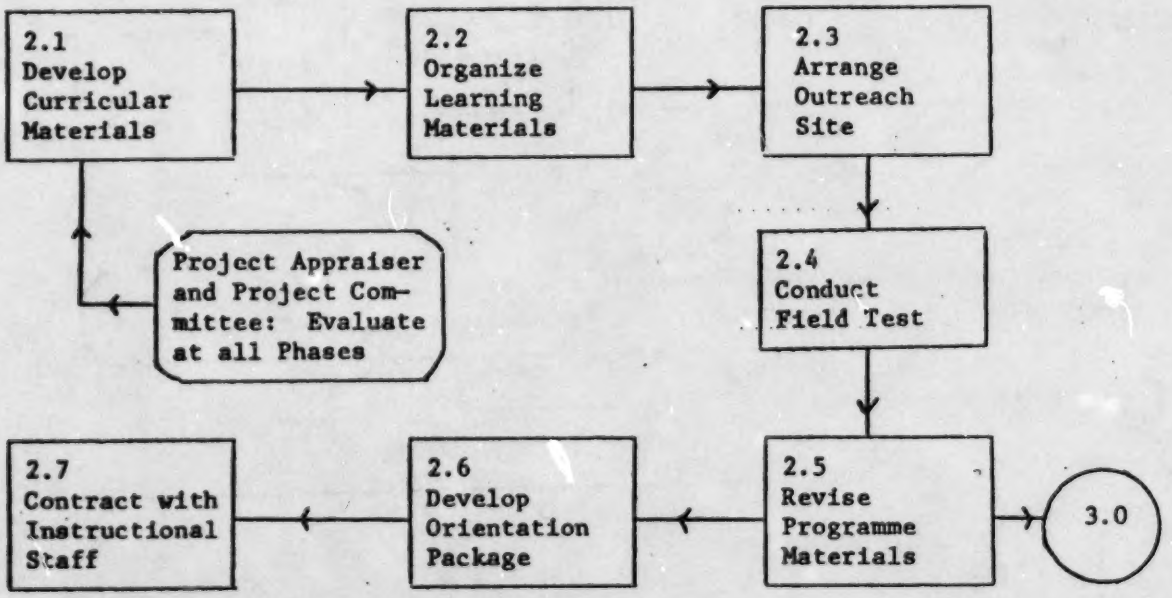
1.0 Reconnaissance Stage


1.1 Initiate Reconnaissance Activities
1.2 Develop Proposal
1.3 Submit Proposal for Discussion
Project Appraiser
1.4 Evaluate and Revise Proposal
Project Committee
Adv. Ed. & M. Personnel
1.5 Submit Proposal for Project Funding

Dec. '77

Jan. '78

2.0 Development Stage

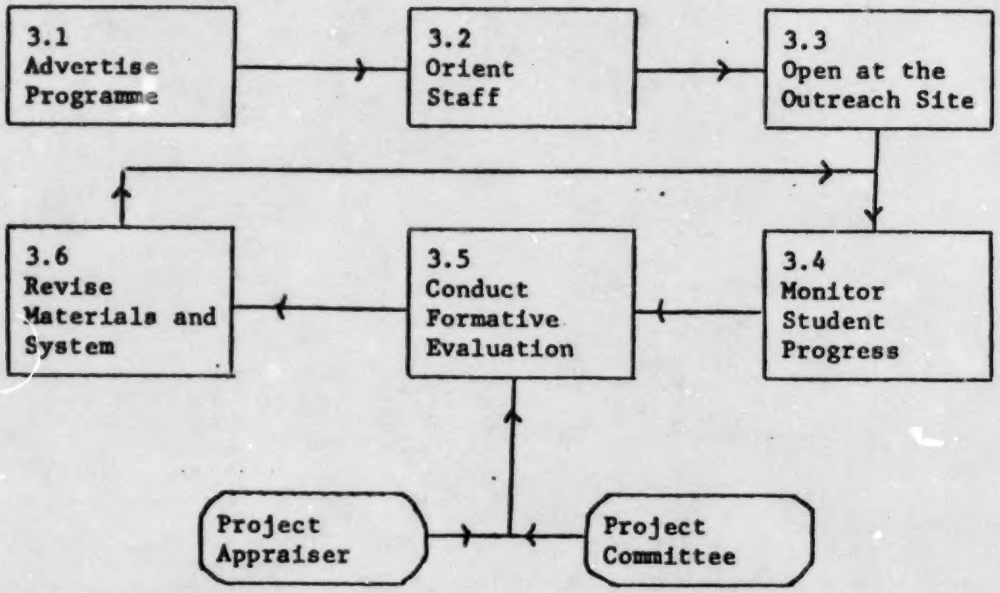

2.1 Develop Curricular Materials
2.2 Organize Learning Materials
2.3 Arrange Outreach Site
Project Appraiser and Project Committee: Evaluate at all Phases
2.4 Conduct Field Test
2.7 Contract with Instructional Staff
2.6 Develop Orientation Package
2.5 Revise Programme Materials
3.0

June '78

Figure 1b Project Flow Chart

Aug. '78

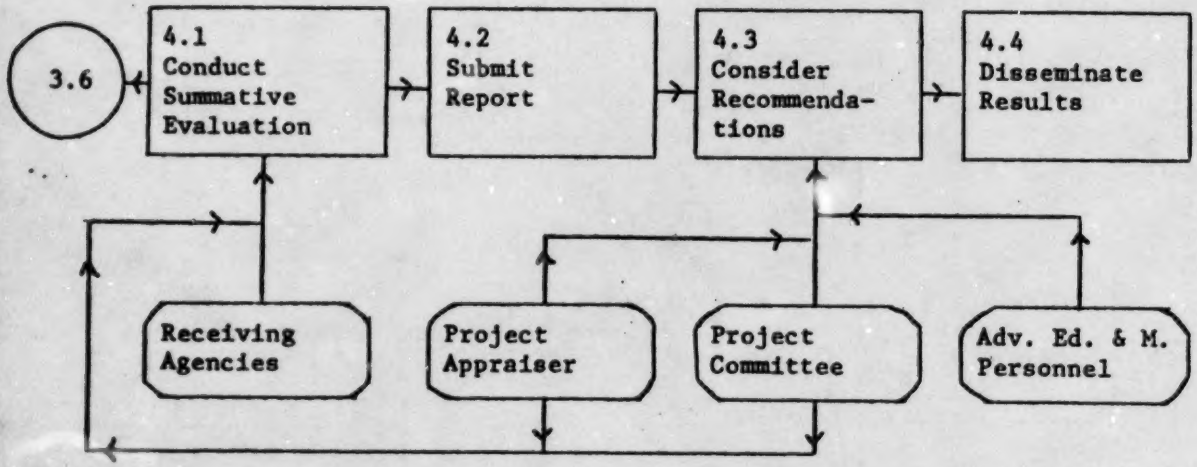
3.0 Implementation Stage



Dec. '78

Jan. '79

4.0 Dissemination Stage



March '79

BUDGET

STAGE	ALBERTA VOCATIONAL CENTRE	INNOVATIVE PROJECTS FUND	TOTAL
Reconnaissance	-	-	-
Development	$16,000	$11,360	$27,360
Implementation	2,080	25,980	28,060
Dissemination	1,000	9,410	10,410
Total	$19,080	$46,750	$65,830

A detailed budget with proposed and actual expenditures comprises Appendix 9. Rationale for significant variances will also be found there.

OUTREACH SITE SELECTION

Criteria Mentioned in the Proposal

1. Target population is those > 25 years of age.
2. Provide access to program for unemployed or under-employed people.
3. Target population should be evenly distributed by sex.
4. Low profile facility with regard to educational institution.
5. Can't sign lease for commercial "store-front" property.
6. Program should be accessable to homemakers and those on social assistance.
7. Minimize the English as a Second Language component in the population.
8. Attendance figures are important so locate in large population area.
9. Area must show comparatively high percentage of functional illiterates.

Criteria Mentioned at Program Development Team Meeting - Data Collected

1. Age distribution of population.
2. Illiteracy level in community.
3. ESL component.
4. Population size.
5. Population growth.
6. Community stability.
7. Economic, unemployment, welfare statistics.
8. Success of other programs.

By applying the above criteria to census data, City of Calgary demographic data, and information solicited from Social Services and various contact agencies, the Program Development Team chose the community of Forest Lawn as the Outreach

area. Further investigation into available facilities resulted in the decision to operate in Forest Lawn Public Library.

IMPLEMENTATION

The instructors, Carol Byrka and Pat Martin, were brought on site one week prior to admitting students to the program. This time was spent getting oriented to the program philosophy, arranging the furnishings satisfactorily and familiarizing themselves with the multitudinous resources and their link to the curricular objectives. This period of time was later recalled as being essential to a successful beginning in an Outreach program. Further orientation included two separate half-day inservice sessions at AVC with experienced ABE staff members. These sessions took place after the Outreach classes began. Details of the total staff orientation are available in Appendix 4 of the report.

On September 11, 1978, the doors were opened to admit students to the program. For the first 2 days, the two instructors and the project director arranged their schedules so that there were always two people on site to receive students. When a student arrived, he was offered a cup of coffee and drawn into a discussion of what the program offered and how this meshed with his personal goals. If it appeared that the student could benefit from the program (and nearly all could), a return appointment was made for further discussion and initial placement activities. The third visit entailed additional placement activities, beginning course work, and formal registration. On the fourth visit, the student made a commitment to an attendance schedule and began a full work program. In retrospect it is inter-

esting to note that most students who ceased attendance at the Adult Learning Centre did so during the first five visits. This is an indication that the orientation procedure was sufficiently thorough to impart an understanding of the program and its benefits without being so threatening as to frighten prospective students away.

The Adult Learning Centre offers an ABE program in reading, writing and arithmetic to the grade 9 equivalency level. Tuition is free, learning materials are provided, attendance is flexible, registration is by drop-in, and there is continuous entry/exit and individualized progress. There is one instructor on site during the hours of operation: Monday - Thursday 1:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m., Friday 1:00 - 6:00 p.m.

The Adult Learning Centre was fully enrolled on the second day of registration, September 12, 1978. Some students come nearly every afternoon or evening; some two or three times a week. The day is divided into two time slots - 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. and 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. with peak attendance periods at 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. and 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. Our original assumption that 10 students at a time would be the maximum number for efficient instruction has been borne out by the experience of the instructional staff at the Centre.

Placement in the program is accomplished by curricular tests geared to the resource material rather than by standardized test. Initial results show modal placement is in the Level II area (Grade 4 - 6). The breakdown was as follows after September placement:

Level	I	English/Reading - 8	(Grade 0 - 3)	Level	I	Math - 9
Level	II	English/Reading - 16	(Grade 4 - 6)	Level	II	Math - 26
Level	III	English/Reading - 9	(Grade 7 - 9)	Level	III	Math - 4

The initial recruitment of students took place in mid-to-late August and was apparently successful judging by the enrolment. Recruitment activities included:

1. circulation of information sheets to Social Service agencies and other educational institutions.
2. referrals from Alberta Vocational Centre - Student Services. These were limited to students living in the greater Forest Lawn area.
3. an ad in the Continuing Education tabloid.
4. press releases by Calgary Public Library and Alberta Vocational Centre.

It appeared certain from discussions with students already enrolled that new students could easily be recruited via current students. As the fall term progressed and again for the new January term several new students were recruited by enrolled students. A full - scale media campaign for recruitment was never necessary - even handbills remained unposted.

The program experienced a surge in attendance in January and February which necessitated introduction of a waiting list even though several students have "graduated" from the drop-in centre to other programs. Many drop in to the centre in less busy times for help on material not directly related to the courses offered and some community members have come in just because it is a quiet place to study and work on their own courses. Two members of the surrounding community come in during the evening to offer tutorial assistance to students thereby assisting the instructor as well. In February, a Priority Employment Program grant facilitated the hiring of a clerical assistant who is able to free the instructors to concentrate on their first priority, tutoring students enrolled in this individualized program.

Some students who dropped in were very specific in their goals e.g. improve spelling skills for report writing, develop the capability to read and understand texts being used in other courses, handle math well enough to succeed on the apprenticeship entrance exam. Many students are more vague concerning their immediate goals. They want to "get Grade 12" or "be able to get a better job" or "improve myself so my kids will have a better chance". A few students dropped in to work on other courses and often asked the instructor for assistance with their problems related to homework. Couple this range of goals with the tremendous variance in ability of students and a picture of the need for individualized instruction becomes indelible.

As discussed in Appendix 5, of the report the instructors made a conscious effort to promote an atmosphere that would be seen as informal, non-threatening, supportive of the individual's needs, and conducive to the learning process. This intent was realized to the extent that students not only showed gains academically but also socially and, in some cases, emotionally. Self-concept of many students appeared to be enhanced and they often seemed more prepared to take control of their own destiny. In short the Learning Centre is a very positive experience for most of the students in attendance.

Some of the distracting influences associated with a new program were certainly evident at the Adult Learning Centre. Our location in the foyer of Forest Lawn Public Library auditorium needed to be completely furnished and supplied. Some unforseen factors such as inadequate shelving for learning resources, no telephone extension, cramped quarters, etc. required adjustment and accommodation by both staff and students. The foyer is open to the traffic noise of people entering and leaving the library area upstairs, cold drafts

from open doors, the nuisance factor of children of all ages trooping through to the washrooms, and the interested stares of patrons of activities taking place in the auditorium. In addition to all this, the Centre has been beseiged by an endless stream of visitors from other institutions and by media personnel taking advantage of the newsworthiness of a new adult literacy program. Through all of this, the students have continued to study accepting the intrusions good-naturedly and exhibiting quiet pride and dignity during interviews.

Further evidence of the motivation to learn on the part of the students is detailed in Appendix 5. Often on busy days, students would be working under extremely crowded conditions and sharing materials and the instructor's time but continued to attend - even Friday afternoon would often see 10 - 12 students working at the A.L.C. Regular students would call the library office to explain to the instructor why they were going to be absent and, in some cases, made special arrangements at home with sitters or relatives in order to have a quiet time to complete lengthy assignments. Many students arrive early for sessions and bring in special learning tasks such as writing letters or resumes. On several occasions, students lamented the fact that the Adult Learning Centre wasn't to be open all year and that there were no Outreach sites in other parts of the city for their friends or relatives to attend.

The counselling service at the Centre consisted on one three-hour visit per week alternating evenings and afternoons in order to meet the needs of more of the students. It was originally planned to offer one-hour formal workshops each week to the students and follow this with a 2-hour personal counselling session. As reported by the counsellors in Appendix 5, it evolved

that students were highly oriented toward academic work and were loathe to take the time necessary to participate in group activities. However a great deal of individual counselling in the areas of personal or vocational concerns did take place and the counsellors were seen by students and staff to be an integral part of the Outreach program.

A similar situation arose with the health services supplied by the nurse on her weekly three-hour visit. The originally planned one-hour clinics and presentations were not viable for conveying health care information. Instead the nurse relied on distribution of pamphlets and books for informational purposes and personal consultations for indepth information, personal health care problems, and referrals to health clinics or specialists. The nurse mentions in Appendix 5 that active clinics where students came in individually for vision tests, hearing checks, blood pressure tests, TB tests, weigh-ins, etc. were relatively successfull. Perhaps this is again a function of individual versus group activity and acceptance of the nurse as part of the Outreach team.

One of the precepts of the project proposal was that the students enrolled in the Outreach program would be screened to exclude those with severe learning disabilities or English as a Second Language (ESL) difficulties. The rationale for this screening was that ten ABE students at various levels of ability working in three subject areas at a given time would present quite enough of a challenge for an academically trained instructor. Although this reasoning has proven accurate, in practice the difficulty lies with the descriptor "severe". Is being hard of hearing or lacking visual acuity to be considered a "severe" learning disability? What about physically handicapped students? At what stage of oral proficiency with English does an ESL problem

cease to present major difficulties with learning to read and write the English language? Should ESL students be allowed to register to study only Math? As the program progressed, it became a question of the instructors determining during the student orientation period where the demarcation line lay with each individual. If it was felt by the instructor that the student could benefit from the program without placing undue strain on the resources (human and material) of the A.L.C., then that individual was registered. If this were not the case, then the instructor, nurse, counsellor, or project director would assist the individual student to find an appropriate program. It is obvious however that this screening activity is an area of needed development in the overall program. An instructor cannot be expected to be all things to all people.

As the implementation of the program progressed towards December, 1978, the instructors in consultation with the project director developed several data collection instruments, report forms, record systems, etc. Throughout the implementation and dissemination stages, the instructors have given a lot of their time to the data collection for the report, particularly the evaluation segment.

ADVANTAGES OF THE OUTREACH PROCESS

The outreach site is physically closer to home and increases accessability to education for students in the community.

The flexibility of the attendance policy allows for better integration of the educational program with students' ongoing life style.

The outreach delivery mode is reaching a different element of society than is usually able to enrol in ABE courses.

Similarly, the program is attracting students who are atypical of the AVC ABE student body.

The community-based adult learning centre allows "education" be be seen as an integral part of a community life style rather than the prerogative of a series of relatively unapproachable institutions.

The four-phase orientation program provides for better "capture" opportunities i.e. the student is given sufficient time to capture the learning opportunity.

The drop-in atmosphere allows for non-goal oriented individuals to mature to goal oriented students.

The individualized nature of the curriculum package allows for student to set specific goals e.g. improved spelling, apprenticeship math.

The presence of the counsellor ensures more realistic goal setting.

The academic gains of most students are considerable and rapid.

Academic achievement and social skills gains lead to a healthier self-concept.

The academic, social, and life style positive gains are an indication of the returns of the program to society.

This ABE program provides a transitional stage for ESL students progressing to written command of English.

DISADVANTAGES OF THE OUTREACH PROCESS

There can be communication difficulties with the parent institution regarding such things as student transfer and referrals, mail service, etc.

There is a very real risk of the Outreach on-site staff developing a sense of isolation from the "regular" staff, especially if the geographic distance is great.

The extra-curricular activities and services of the parent institution are not readily available to Outreach students.

There is a slower turnaround time for service requests e.g. duplicating, Audio Visual equipment repairs.

Outreach programming results in disproportionately increased personnel time for liaison and supervision.

The Outreach student could suffer "culture shock" upon transfer to a traditional learning environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Program Development

The Program Development Team approach is valuable to the institution and to the quality of the resultant program.

A systems approach to program development utilizing predetermined timelines, sequenced activities, and definite reporting dates keeps the team abreast of activities and helps to prevent delays and omissions in the process.

It is most important to perform a detailed community needs assessment prior to deciding on a location for the new program in order to maximize the chance of success and to best serve the target population.

Program Structure

The instructional stance must be tutorial, individualized, and self-paced in order to allay the fears of "keeping up" that haunt the adult learner.

The informal atmosphere is very important to the older adult returning to the learning environment.

The student should be "eased" into the full instructional program in order to reduce the threat factor and to ensure the educational activities are aligned with his immediate and long-term goals.

There should be allowance made for learners to pursue specific goals rather than just "take a course".

In an ABE Outreach program, maximum effort is to be directed towards bolstering the student's self-concept as many academic, employment, and positive life style gains can result from a healthier self-concept.

Because of the tremendous instructional and record-keeping load on the instructors, a detailed curriculum guide and learning resources package is essential to success.

The number of students should be kept at about 10 per instructor in order to retain the personalized nature of the instruction.

Staff Selection

Staff selection must be carried out with great care as Outreach instructors operate without supervision the great majority of the time. The ideal instructor is self-motivated, empathetic to the special needs of the adult learner, and well-experienced in individualized instruction.

An initial Orientation period on site without students is essential for the staff to familiarize themselves with the program.

Because of the diverse characteristics of the students dropping in to the program, an instructor with some experience in identifying the presence of a learning disability would be an asset.

Student Recruitment

All forms of the media should be utilized when student recruitment takes place. Although radio and television are obviously more effective (though costly), a surprising number of non-readers are reached through the print media via friends and relatives.

It is essential to set up a communications and referral network through community agencies and educational institutions.

Once open, the successful program will be besieged by friends and relatives of students who want to enrol. Allow for this phenomenon if the program is to be "drop-in".

The drop-in aspect is enhanced if an "institutional" type of location is avoided when choosing an Outreach site.

The Outreach Process

The hours of operation should include day and evening periods and attendance policy must be flexible in order to allow the adult to fit the program into his existing life style.

For an urban ABE Outreach site, Public transit access and available parking at the site are both very important to the students.

Regular visits from supervisory personnel (weekly if possible), inservice activities with regular program staff, and good communication links are necessary to prevent an sense of isolation in Outreach staff.

Learning resources supplementation and equipment maintenance must receive immediate attention if long turnaround times are to be avoided.

The weekly visits of the counsellor and nurse are deemed an integral part of the Outreach ABE program providing full service to the adult learner.